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Catching Clara

A Commencement Play

By

LOUISE RAND BASCOM

(Acting Rights Free to Purchaser of 12 Copies)

Price 35 Cents

MARCH BROTHERS, Publishers
208, 210, 212 Wright Avenue, Lebanon, Ohio

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By

Louise Rand Bascom

Author of "The Masonic Ring," "The Golden Goblet," etc.

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FOREWORD

So much need has been felt for a play in which a whole graduating class may take part that "Catching Clara" has been specially designed to meet such a requirement. If necessary, however, the cast may be reduced to any number by doubling up on the parts. At least twenty-four should be used for the final procession scene, though even more would increase the effect of the finale. A small number may be augmented if those who pass out through corridors L. and R. will hurry back of the scenes and re-enter at C. If semi-transparent scenery is used, however, candles should be blown out after exit at L. and R. and relit before re-entering at C. Otherwise, the makeshift will become apparent to the audience. In an entertainment where regular stage setting is unprocurable, the walls for the third act may be made of green bunting or denim (preferably denim) with wide arches at L. and R. and two doors at C. The doors may be borrowed from any hinges and hung temporarily. Some strong support should be placed behind them so that the scenery will not shake when they are opened.

Any box which is large enough to contain a person may be used for the business of the first, second and third acts. As Clara's window seat the loose boards are laid on top, with a window cushion resting on the boards. If holes for the nails are already bored—an advisable proceeding—care should be exercised lest the work of putting on the cover appear too easy. Several good laughs should be worked up out of the popular fallacy that a woman can not drive a nail.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Clara Craddock, *President of the Senior Class of Rutland College.*

Myrtle Bank,
Isabel Langley,
Daisy Green,
Bug Beal,
Beth Mathis,
Willye Raye,
Joy Jones,
} *Seniors.*

Cassie White, *President of the Junior Class of Rutland College.*

Katie Hugo,
Mattie Bragg,
Margaret Waterman,
Hazel Due,
Minnie Tracy,
} *Juniors.*

Muggsy,
Pete,
} *Two Burglars.*

Prof. Rice,
Howard Brace,
George Grenville,
} *Settlement House Committee for Rutland Tech.*

Mrs. Grenville, *George's mother—a Commencement visitor.*

Patsy Flannigan,
Tom Smith,
Giovanni Givanni,
Hans Reuther,
} *Settlement House children.*

Putnam, *a negro janitor.*

SYNOPSIS

Act I.—Evening in a dormitory room at Rutland College for Women.

Act II.—3 P. M. the following day in a dormitory room at Rutland Tech.

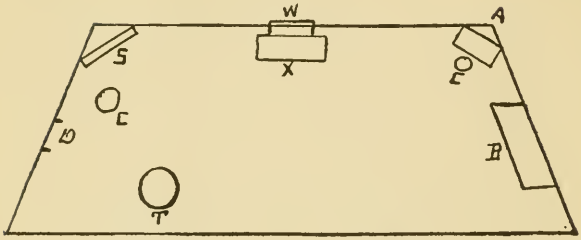
Act III.—Evening in South Corridor of Rutland College Hall.

Place.—A college town.

Time.—Present.

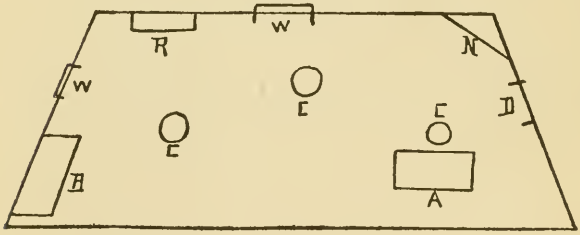
STAGE DIAGRAMS

ACT I.



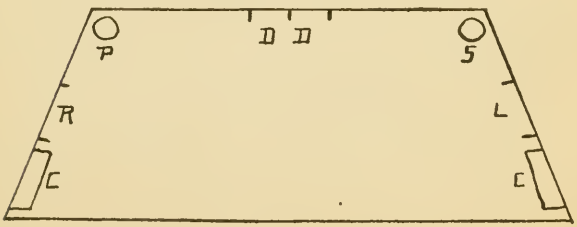
A—Desk.
B—Bed.
C—Chair.
D—Door.
S—Screen.
T—Table.
W—Window.
X—Box.

ACT II.



A—Desk.
B—Bed.
C—Chair.
D—Door.
N—Curtain.
R—Bookcase.
W—Window.

ACT III.



C—Settee.
DD—Double Door.
P—Palms.
S—Statuary.
L—Archway.
R—Archway.

CATCHING CLARA

ACT 1.

SCENE—*Dormitory room of* CLARA CRADDOCK. *The walls are adorned with college pennants, pictures, tennis rackets, etc. Electric lights or lamps are lit.* CLARA *and* MYRTLE *stand by a table down* R. *making fudge.* ISABEL, DAISY *and* BETH *in kimonos or Peter Thompson suits lounge on bed-couch down* L.—BETH *half asleep.* WILLYE *and* JOY *sit on the floor at their feet with knees drawn up. They are scanning a copy of "Life" and giggle silently from time to time, pointing out some amusing joke. Before the curtain rises the girls begin singing their college song. After the rise they sing the chorus—the girls on the floor nonchalantly, still reading "Life"; ISABEL and DAISY vivaciously keeping time with their heads; the girls at the chafing dish with dignity, though beating the table with spoons. A gong rings outside.*

CLARA (*stirring fudge*)—There's the silence bell.

ISABEL (*chanting from the couch*)—Three more days and we'll be free from this hole of miser-ce.

MYRTLE—Last year I wept when the Seniors gave up the steps to us Juniors. It seemed so sad to see them going out from their Alma Mater.

JOY—And this year it was all you could do to look mournful when the Juniors took the steps from *you*. I don't feel a bit sorry to grab my diploma and hike.

CLARA—Yes, yes. Everybody's tired. It's hard to be sentimental when you're tired.

WILLYE (*looking up from "Life"*)—I'm so glad to know other people feel the same way. I've wept every night for four years at the prospect of being separated from my friends at graduation. Now I don't care if I never see one of them again. (*Resumes reading.*)

DAISY and ISABEL (*shaking their fingers at* WILLYE's *back*)—Fie, fie, naughty Will-eye.

CLARA—Let her alone; I know exactly how she feels. (*Knock at door* R. *Girls look at each other.*) S-sh!

ISABEL (*rising*)—Don't you dare go to the door, Clara. It may be a Junior. (*Again the knock.*)

MYRTLE (*getting chair from* R. *back*)—Here, let's put the chair by the door. You can look through the transom, Belle. You're taller than I.

ISABEL (*mounting chair*)—I know perfectly well it's Katie Hugo or Mattie Bragg or both of them. They've hardly let you out of their sight for a month, Clara. (*Looks out.*) Oh, it's only Bug. Wait a minute, Bug. I'll let you in. (*Climbs down, unlocks door and opens it cautiously.*)

MYRTLE—It's time Bug came along with a plan!

ISABEL—Enter, Lady Bug.

BUG (*entering*) — It's dreadful! Just dreadful! (*Walks aimlessly around the room, looking at various things. Finally sits down on window seat* C. *Back, where she picks at the pillows.*)

ISABEL (*going to table to taste the fudge*)—Of course it's dreadful. It's worse than dreadful! It's fierce! It's up to you to do something, Bug.

BUG (*scornfully*)—Up to me! Oh, yes! If things don't come out all right, it'll all be my fault. Why does the whole Senior Class pick on me to get 'em out of this hole, I'd like to know?

JOY (*lazily*)—Because you advertise your brains more than anybody else, Bug, my dear.

BUG (*tossing a pillow savagely*)—Tomorrow's our last chance. (*Urgently.*) Girls, we just must do something! We just can't let those fool Juniors keep us from the Senior Book Burning.

DAISY—Well, we can't have the Book Burning without our president and we can't have the torchlight procession till the books are cremated. I don't see what we're going to do.

ISABEL—Those nasty Juniors are doing everything in their power to prevent us from graduating. Book Burning is the prettiest custom we have. I hate to be kept from it! The Juniors have been too superior for words lately! The wretches!

JOY—They'll be insufferable if we can't steal away from them for the burning.

MYRTLE—If we don't burn our note-books you may be sure we'll go down in the history of the college as the class that never graduated.

CLARA—Myrtle's right. The faculty may give us our diplomas, but if we don't get our books burned we shall never feel that we have got our degrees. (*Sits dejectedly on chair* R.)

BUG—Cheer up—keep believin'. Something'll turn up. We've got till ten o'clock tomorrow night.

WILLYE—And Clara watched every minute. Mark my words! Sure as Fate the Juniors will steal Clara and keep her locked up all day tomorrow. There's no hope for it, we're beaten.

MYRTLE (*extinguishing alcohol flame and pouring fudge into a pan*)—Being beaten isn't the worst of it. It's appearing before the Juniors in South Corridor tomorrow night and acknowledging the defeat! That's what gets me!

ISABEL—You've *got* to think up something, Bug!

BETH (*stretching sleepily*)—No more hash. (*Crossly*) —I tell you I don't want any more hash! Want some blue balloons—quite fresh. (*Girls on couch shake and pinch her.*)

DAISY—Wake up, sleepy-head. The fudge is nearly cool.

BETH (*still sleepily*)—I'll take drawn-butter. Blue balloons with drawn-butter. Ouch, leave go my arm! (*Sits up and looks around dejectedly.*)

DAISY—Wake up! Get busy! We're in an awful box. Wake up and help us out.

BUG (*rising excitedly*)—I've got it! I've got it! I've got it! (*Frantically begins throwing shoes, clothes, books, etc., out of* CLARA's *window box.*

CHORUS—Got what!

BUG—It! *It!* The idea for our salvation! It did take my brains after all.

ISABEL—Yes, we see it took your brains. We're mighty sorry to lose them, too—right when we needed them so.

BUG—Greatest idea since Demosthenes divorced his wife.

BETH—Did he divorce his wife?

BUG—Why will you always fuss about detail? Perhaps it was Napoleon. Anyway, here's the box and there's Clara. What's simpler?

CLARA—Bug, you are a genius! We'll all admit it; but if you think I'm crazy about being penned up in that window box, you don't know me!

BUG (*dragging box down* L.)—Yes, make objections. Ask me to save the name of the class and then balk when I get hold of an idea that will make us immortal. There's plenty of air here! What's your kick? Plenty of cracks, knot-holes and sich-like. It's only an *old* packing case. You won't hurt it any. Honest you won't! Will she, girls?

JOY—You mean you're going to put poor Clara into that box?

Bug—Sure. Put her in, nail her up, let box out of window! Isabel can go telephone an expressman while we're doing it and Clara'll be carted out of the way before she knows it. (*Strikes an attitude.*)—I did it! I've got the head!

Isabel—A mighty big one, Bug.

Clara (*kicking at box with one foot*)—That's all very fine, but I have no hankering to bump down three stories in that flimsy thing. Besides, it's too big to go out the window.

Bug (*disgustedly*)—You folks make me sick with your everlasting detail. (*Looks back at window.*) It is too big! We'll have to cut it down.

Joy—What? The window?

Bug—No, the box, of course. I don't wonder we've never got our books burned with only one brain in the class.

Clara—But it's against rules for anyone to leave the dormitory after ten o'clock. If I did get out the Juniors would say we didn't play fair and there'd be a row on with the faculty.

Daisy—Well, why not shut Clara in the box tonight and set her in the hall? We can get the expressman to take her to the Dean's cottage the first thing in the morning.

Joy—Why not? She can easily steal away from there to the North Woods and we can drift over one by one for the burning.

Isabel—Better and better. The Dean has been collecting old clothes to send to the settlement house. We'll mark you old clothes, Clara. Nobody will ever suspect.

CLARA—The idea is fine theoretically. The Dean'll look after me when she gets me, but I'm not begging to spend the night nailed up in a packing case. What if there's a fire? You mutts'll go off and let me roast to death.

BUG—Aways fussing about your individual feelings! You've got to save the class! Anybody else'd be glad of the chance!

MYRTLE—Belle's right. We can't leave you to nail yourself up, Clara. (*Goes to desk.*) We must all go to our rooms to sleep or the Juniors will suspect.

ISABEL—Yes, you stay in the hall all night. The expressman will wheel you out the first thing in the morning and the Dean'll have you out of the box by seven or eight.

CLARA—There's no telling what'll happen to me. It's too foolhardy. I have a father and mother and kid brother to be considered.

BUG—Yes, but it isn't as though you were leaving them anything.

WILLYE—You'll at least be spared hearing your father tell that your education cost him ten thousand when you know you never had so much as a dime to buy a sundae.

MYRTLE—Go on, Clara. Be a sport. It's our only chance.

CLARA (*stepping into the box*)—Oh, I'll go, of course. There's nothing else to do, but I know what'll happen. You'll put me in the hall and then you'll stand around whispering to me till somebody suspects. They'll dump me in the pond if you let on.

WILLYE—Give us credit for some discretion.

CLARA—Well, there are penalties for being class president. I guess the sacrifice is up to me. Give me a couple of pillows, Daisy.

WILLYE (*bringing tooth-brush and soap from behind screen*)—Want these, Clara dear?

BUG (*tossing a can of condensed milk and a box of crackers into* CLARA's *retreat*) — You may need these, prexie. Here's a cake of chocolate, too. Give it to the Dean if you don't want it. She's getting too thin. Needs more sugar and less starch in her diet.

BETH—Don't you mean protein?

BUG (*rummaging through drawers of* CLARA's *desk, which are crammed with all manner of things that exude from time to time*)—There you go again. Always detail —detail.

DAISY—Here's a pocket flash-light to peruse *Sweetness and Light.* Or should you prefer *Pride and Prejudice?*

CLARA (*disappearing*)—*Paradise Lost* would be better. You don't seem to realize the greatness of my sacrifice. I shall be bowed and bent forever more.

BUG (*still rummaging at* CLARA's *desk*)—There's a hammer here somewhere. I remember putting it in. Haven't you any nails?

CLARA—In the table drawer.

ISABEL—Here's your kimmie and your boudoir cap, Clara dear. Take 'em along. No telling what you'll need.

CLARA—I'd be more comfortable with a life preserver and fire extinguisher. I know something awful is going to happen to me.

DAISY (*throwing in some puffs and a false braid*)—Better take these, too. Don't let the Juniors say that we cast you off without your belongings.

BETH (*peering in at* CLARA)—Are you going to be *very* uncomfortable, Clara dear?

CLARA—*Very*, thank you.

ISABEL (*dancing a little*)—Won't it be fine to see those Juniors tomorrow night!

BUG (*puts boards on top of packing case and begins nailing it up*)—Don't cackle too soon. Plague it! I hit my sore thumb again. (*Picks up dust-cloth and wraps over left hand before proceeding*)—I wonder why men don't know enough to make a straight hammer. I never picked up one yet that wasn't crooked. Simply *can't* use 'em without an accident policy.

MYRTLE (*turning from desk where she has been writing*)—Here are two gorgeous placards I have made. (*Holds them up.*) Mrs. D. D. Drake, College Hill. That's plain enough, isn't it? Look at the slant on this old clothes one? They say when your handwriting goes up that way, it means optimism. Perhaps it is foretelling a successful outcome to our adventures.

BUG (*taking signs and tacking them in place*)—I suspect Clara would rather have a "Handle with Care" one, but she won't get it this time. I wish I were class president. What fun you will have, Clara.

CLARA (*inside*)—Oh, shut up!

BUG—Bet the East End Tech boys never thought of anything as clever as this. Ouch! There's that dratted finger again.

MYRTLE (*peeking into case*)—Do you feel comfy, Clara?

CLARA—NO!

BUG (*putting in the last nail*)—Better change the placards and send her to a Zoo. She's cross enough.

MYRTLE (*leaning on case*)—Anything more you'd like to say, Clara dear?

CLARA—Give my love to mother.

MYRTLE—She says to give her love to mother. Is there anything else we ought to say to her before she goes?

CLARA (*wildly*)—I want a handkerchief—a handkerchief.

ISABEL (*taking one from her blouse, and jamming it through a crack*)—Here's one. Are you ready now?

BUG—Yes, all take hold. That's right! Now! Push! It's a good thing Clara put rollers on this box or we'd never get it out. (*They roll box to door,* CLARA *groaning.*)

MYRTLE—Keep still, Clara, we're going to open the door. (*The box is pushed outside, and all but* BUG *and* ISABEL *go off shouting, "Good night," "Sweet dreams," "Better go to bed, Bug, Clara needs her sleep."*)

ISABEL (*re-entering*)—The hardest part is yet to do. We must put Clara's "Asleep" sign on the door and fix her bed so that anyone peeking in will think she's in it. (ISABEL *pulls couch cover from the bed, while* BUG *stealthily opens the door and pins up sign reading "Asleep," which she has found on* CLARA'S *desk.*)

BUG—We shall have to be mighty clever. Don't let on to the expressman when he comes for the box in the morning. If you do he'll go off with a grin on his face and everybody'll suspect at once.

ISABEL (*arranging clothes under bed-covers to make a hump*)—You must think I got to college yesterday! I quit sucking peppermint sticks ages ago.

BUG (*going to bed and looking down*)—Muss the pillows up more. That's better. It looks too neat. I'll scatter some of Clara's clothes around. It'll look more innocent and natural. (*Pulls boxes out from under the bed and proceeds to scatter their contents—evening dresses, sashes, gym suits, etc. The room presents an air of great confusion.*)

ISABEL—We are doing this splendidly. I feel sure we'll get away with it. (*Leans over and kisses the pillow tenderly*)—Good night, Clara dear. Want your window opened? What? It is? Well, we won't stay to bother you! Did I put the milk on the windowsill? Yes, I tended to that. Good night, dear.

BUG—You blooming idiot!

ISABEL—I'm working myself up to a suitable exit. (*Turns lights down and walks softly to the door.*)

BUG (*contemptuously ambling after*)—Has Frohman given you a job or is it Grand Opera?

ISABEL—Vaudeville, of course. I'm king of cut-ups.

BUG—Queen of quitters is the slogan now. Avaunt! (*Exit both, then turn and stick their heads through door opening.*)

ISABEL—Get as much sleep as you can, dear. You'll need your strength tomorrow.

BUG (*lustily*)—Good night, Clara.

(*The stage is left vacant for thirty seconds, then the door is slyly pushed open.* KATIE *and* MATTIE *peep in.*)

MATTIE (*pushing the button of a flashlight and speaking in low tones*)—I tell you I watched the door every minute. She's here all right.

KATIE—Well, they made a lot of noise in here. I certainly heard Bug chuckle too. A chuckle at this stage of the game means something.

MATTIE—She didn't go down the fire-escape, because Reta is watching it. Besides it's against rules for her to go out at night. We've got her all right.

KATIE—S-sh! She *is* in bed!

MATTIE—Leave her alone, then. It must be after midnight. Come on back.

KATIE (*throwing a kiss at* CLARA'S *bed*)—You don't know what's in store for you tomorrow, Miss Senior President. (*Exit both.*)

(*The stage is left vacant thirty seconds. Then two burglars climb in window* C. *Back.*)

Muggsy (*in low tones*)—All the gals'll be so tarred (tired) they'll be a sleepin' like winter snakes.

Pete (*stealing forward*)—An' in the rush o' packin' they'll not miss so much as a whistle. Ought to git a lot o' green in the way o' travelin' money, too. Turn on the glim, Muggsy, let's squint a bit. (*The glow of the bulls-eye illumines the disorder—petticoats, shoes, etc.*)

Muggsy (*backing in dismay*)—Strip-ed skunks!

Pete (*starting for the window*)—I'm a goin' home. This ain't no place fur a gentleman! (*Makes exit, dropping keys, jimmy, etc., as he flees.*)

Muggsy (*also making exit*)—Don't ketch me a stayin' 'roun' no barging counter. Strip-ed skunks—they do look different off 'an' they do on—don't they now? (*Exit.*)

(*The stage is left vacant for thirty seconds, then a gong rings. A truck and bumping are heard outside the door.*)

Isabel (*sticking head inside*)—Better get up, Clara dear. Lots to do today. Got a head-ache, you say! You slept too hard. Well, I'll leave the sign on the door any way. (*Enters*)—My, but it has been a long night! (*Listens at door*)—Wonder what Katie Hugo and Mattie are up to? They're headed down the corridor. (*Knock.*) What had I better do? (*Knock.* Isabel *half opens door*) —Hello, girls! Just came down to wake Clara. She's so tired I guess I'll let her alone.

Katie—We have to speak to her.

ISABEL—Awfully sorry, but you can't. She's asleep. I mean she has a headache.

MATTIE—Just let us peek then. That's a nice Belle. (*Both girls peek and burst into the room, followed by three Juniors. A light rug is thrown over* BELLE's *head before she knows it.*)

KATIE—Ha—ha! Beat you that time, Belle. But we'll take you along with your beloved president just to be good to you. (*Goes to bed.*) Get up and dress, Clara. You're our prisoner! (*Pokes hump in the bed and leans over quickly.*) Girls, it's not Clara!

ALL—What!

MATTIE—Oh! Oh! Have I let her get away? (*Rushes around frantically.*) See! Oh see! Here are muddy footsteps—huge ones!

MARGARET—And a jimmy and keys. Clara's been murdered or abducted.

KATIE—Murdered nothing! Those are Bug Beal's footprints. I'd know 'em anywhere. The Seniors dropped that stuff for a blind. Pooh, it wouldn't *blind* a chicken! (*Sits down and thinks wildly.*) The room's been watched every minute.

MATTIE—Yes, not a single thing has come out of it except—

KATIE—That box! (*Starts for the door, shouting at the top of her lungs*)—That box of old clothes, girls! Quick!

MATTIE (*following, shouting*)—Of course! Stop the box!

ALL (*pell-mell and in different keys*)—Stop the box! Stop the box! Stop the box!

(*Quick curtain.*)

ACT II.

SCENE—*Dormitory room of* GEORGE GRENVILLE. *It is characterized by greater simplicity than the room in the foregoing act. The walls are bare save for one or two photographs of men's glee clubs and a pipe rack. The furniture is mission. At rise* GEORGE GRENVILLE *is discovered at the table-desk down* L. *writing a letter.*)

GEORGE (*reading aloud as he writes*)—Dear Father: Thanks for your good letter. I am glad you look forward to my home coming. I want to get there all right, all right, but I don't see how I'm going to get there with a bank account of goose eggs. (*Tears paper up in disgust.*) That's as bald as the governor's head. It'll never do. (*Scratches ear thoughtfully.*) Guess I'll write one to mother and be more casual-like. (*Writes and reads*)—Dear Mother:— (*Knock.*) Come.

PROF. RICE (*entering* L. *followed by* HOWARD)—Ah—er—the committee rooms are—er—all occupied, Grenville. Brace—ah—er—suggested we hold the settlement workers' committee meeting here. Er—ah—you have no objections, I hope?

GEORGE—None at all. (*Looks at his watch.*) I'm glad you came. I'd forgotten all about the thing. (HOWARD *picks up papers scattered on floor and stands by window* C. *Back alternately reading the papers and looking out.*)

PROF. RICE (*seating himself in Morris chair*)—Ah—er—ours is a great work, looking after the poor and needy. You have no conception of how—er—ah—touched I was when the townspeople made me the chairman of their charities committee. (GEORGE *and* HOWARD *exchange winks and look bored.*) Now, with everything going through my hands there is—er—ah—no promiscuous giving. Everything is adapted to the individual. The work is er—ah—conducted in an orderly manner. I may say—

HOWARD—Everyone knows your conduct is most orderly, professor.

PROF. RICE—Ah—er—yes, I may say that I—er—ah—find the confidence placed in me—er—ah—most inspiring—most. I was—er—ah—most—ah—touched and gratified to receive notification from the Dean of the young ladies' college of the town to the effect that she was—er—ah—sending a box of clothing.

HOWARD—I saw it down in the basement this morning.

PROF. RICE—Yes, er—ah—knowing it to be there, I sent word to some of the settlement house children to come help us—er—ah—unpack it. I imagine there will be much—er—ah—vanity in the box and the gaieties of life please the young.

GEORGE—Well, it'll be interesting to discover what sort of a box the young ladies can pack, all right, all right. I confess to a fear of tin cans and worn-out chafing dishes.

PROF. RICE—The boxes from the girls pass through the Dean's hands. There—ah—will be no practical joking. (*Knock.*) I assure you I will tolerate no practical jokes. (*Knock.*) Ah—er—that must be the little ones. I will —er—ah—let them in. Flowers are—er—ah—not half so fair as children's faces. (*Opens door.*) (*Enter* PATSY, TOM, GIOVANNI *and* HANS. *They are attired in incongruous costumes and their hands and faces are muddy, grimy and smeared with remnants of pop-corn ball.* TOM *eats peanuts steadily throughout the scene, shooting shells at different things of interest and refusing to divide.*) Ah, here you are—er—my posies. Come in, come in. You will find a seat for you over yonder on the—er—ah—bed.

GEORGE (*rising wildly and standing before the bed, as he contemplates the children's dirt*)—Oh, no, no. You mustn't sit there. You see it wouldn't do at all. Who was it, Brace—Billy Fisher, wasn't it that had measles here?

HOWARD (*laughing*)—I believe so, but papers won't carry germs. (*Carries newspapers to bed and spreads them out there.*) See these nice, clean papers, Mr. Grenville is going to let you sit on so you won't get any germs.

HANS—I no afraid of germs. Dey ist ver-ee nice tings—germs.

GEORGE—You shouldn't make such remarks. You don't know what you are talking about.

HANS (*seating himself with the other children*)—Ach, I do too know. I tell you dere ist nineteen in our family already yet and every one he come from Germ-any.

HOWARD (*laughing*)—Well, Mr. Grenville did not come from Germ-any, so I guess he'll have to admit you know more about germs than he does.

HANS—Ach, I know about germs—leetle germs and big germs. I can tell dem all.

PROF. RICE—The box will—er—ah—be here shortly and then you will each have something to take home. What—er—ah—should you like? (*Points finger at* TOM.) You, for instance.

TOM (*sullenly*)—I want to git some top clothes and some underclothes.

PROF. RICE (*making a note in his memorandum book*)—Some top clothes and some underclothes. Yes, yes. Ah—er—I fear this box from a young ladies' college will scarcely fit your needs, but I shall bear you in mind. What do *you* want? (*Points at* PATSY, *who possesses only a rudimentary pig-tail.*)

PATSY—Shoire'n Oi'll be wishin' fur a big jewelled latch-pin fur me back-hair—diamonts and emeralds preferred. (*Knock.*)

PROF. RICE—There is the—er—ah—box. (GEORGE *opens door.*) We shall now have the pleasure of ministering to you, my lambies.

TOM—Don't want none o' your preachin'. (*Children all make dreadful faces as* PROFESSOR *turns his back.*)

PUTNAM (*wheeling box in and down* C.)—Hyah's youh box, professah. De 'pressman done brung him dis mawnin' eahly.

PROF. RICE (*reading placard*)—But this is addressed to Mrs. Drake.

PUTNAM—Yes, sah. De 'pressman say dat you all ast him and ast him so much about dat box of ole clothes dat he brung you de fust one he seen ready.

PROF. RICE—Ah—er—I see now. It is marked old clothes. I presume Mrs. Drake did not find time to change the address. That will do, Putnam.

PUTNAM—Yes, sah. (*Pulls box opener from his pocket.*) Doan you want me to open hit foh you, sah?

PROF. RICE—No, Putnam. I know you have other duties. I will attend to it myself. (*Stands by box with opener in his hands.*)

PUTNAM—Yes, sah. (*Exit.*)

PROF. RICE—Now, lambies, here's the nice box. I presume that it will contain—er—ah—shoes—and—er—ah—stockings and—er—ah—skirts and—er—ah—

GIOVANNI—You giva me de pretty clothes for my sister and my pa he maka da hurdy-gurdy to playa under your weendow.

PROF. RICE—Yes, yes. You shall all have pretty things. (HOWARD *and* GEORGE *stand by box.*) Ouch! Volumes of Euclid! (*Drops box opener and wrings his hand.*) It has always been a matter of curiosity to me why some one really scientific does not—er—ah—invent useful implements for the—er—ah—benefit of man. I have never picked up one yet that was not made by a lumbering lout.

GEORGE (*prying at box cover*)—Perhaps I shall have better luck.

PATSY—Oi wants some top clothes, too.

PROF. RICE—Just a moment, lambie. You may have your choice of anything here.

PATSY—Some top clothes and a jewelled latch-pin. Ma said Oi was ter git some spoons too ef there was any handy.

PROF. RICE—Yes, yes, just a moment.

GEORGE—This box ought to hold a pretty good sized Klondike nugget. It's heavy enough. (HOWARD *tries to lift box.*)

HOWARD—Gee, it *is* heavy!

GEORGE (*throwing back cover*)—Holy smoke!

GIOVANNI—I hopa my clothes they do not burn.

CLARA (*rising stiffly*)—I am so stiff I can scarcely move. Please help me, someone. (*Both* GEORGE *and* HOWARD *rush to help her.*)

TOM—She ain't got on nuthin' I want.

PATSY (*beginning to wail*)—I want de latch-pin fur me back hair.

GIOVANNI—Don't weepa de tears, cara mia. It is a sister that they giva you. Don't you understand! One nica sister.

PATSY—Oi got a dozen sisters. I want a latch-pin fur me back hair.

PROF. RICE—There, there, lambies, not so much noise. We shall attend to you in a moment. (*To* CLARA)—I don't know which young man connived with you to—er—ah—play this joke on me, but I wish to voice my distinct disapproval—my *distinct* disapproval. I do not tolerate practical jokes.

CLARA (*sinking into a chair*)—Well, if you think it's a joke to be fastened up in a box for fifteen hours, your sense of humor is rudimentary.

GEORGE and HOWARD—Fifteen hours!

CLARA—Yes. We want to have the Senior Book Burning today so that we can have our procession tonight. The Juniors have watched me so carefully that this was the only way to make my escape.

GEORGE—And you got into that box to get away from the Juniors! Great!

CLARA—I thought I should be taken to the Dean's, but the expressman was expecting a box for you Tech people, so he brought me here.

HOWARD—Aren't you starved?

CLARA—Nearly, though some crackers and a cake of chocolate helped some.

PROF. RICE—I shall have to ask you all to come to the office that I may inquire into this. I—er—ah—don't know when I have been so shocked—so—er—ah—distressed. To think of the anguish you have caused the lambies, too.

PATSY—Oi want my top clothes and my latch-pin! Booh-hooh! Oi give me sister what was left of me all-day sucker to finish the washin' an' now Oi ain't a goin' ter git nothin' back. Booh-hooh!

HANS (*going to window*)—Ach, I don't want any of dem top clothes. I vill climb down de fire-ladder.

PROF. RICE—There, there, lambies, just a moment. (*To others*)—This is frightful! Disgraceful! Have you no compassion for the suffering you are causing?

HANS—Ach, look at de vimmens! Look at de vimmens!

CLARA (*rising stiffly*)—Oh, I know those Juniors are on my track.

HOWARD—Surely not. (*He and* GEORGE *rush to windows.*)

HANS—I never seen so many vimmens. Such funny ways dey wear de clothes, too. Each wears a sleeve for a skirt already yet.

GIOVANNI—We shall all have extra sisters, is it not so?

GEORGE—Gee, look at the campus! It's white with them.

CLARA (*in agony*)—Oh, what shall I do? They mustn't get me now! (*Knock.*) What shall I do?

PUTNAM (*entering*)—I'se sorry to disturb you all, sah, but de young ladies from de college say dey's a mistake about dis heah box. Dey give me five dollahs to bring hit back, sah.

CLARA—Oh, they mustn't—*mustn't* catch me now! (*Imploring the* PROFESSOR)—Help me, professor! Help me!

PROF. RICE—Yes, yes, lambie—er—I mean precious—er—ah—madam. I see you really need the aid of the sterner sex. Indeed, I apologize for misjudging you. I will do all in my power—all in my power to assist you. Er—ah—what can we do, gentlemen?

GEORGE—Send the box back.

CLARA—But someone will have to go in it. (*Looks appealingly at the audience.*) Oh, won't somebody please get into the box?

HANS—I vill get into de box ef it will oblige you, lady.

PATSY (*shrilly*)—Oi want to—Oi want to. Lemme; lemme!

GIOVANNI—I—I stand ready to serva you, cara mia.

PROF. RICE—There, lambies, there. Be quiet. I think perhaps I had better go. A wiser head than—er—ah—yours is needed in this matter.

GEORGE (*springing into the box*)—Sorry to disappoint you, professor, but you may be needed for the Tech commencement. Don't you dare tell those girls I'm in here, Putnam.

PUTNAM (*beginning to nail up the box*)—No, sah, I ain't gwine to tell nobody, sah.

CLARA—Oh, how perfectly noble of you to save me this way. Please hurry, please! (*Turns to* HOWARD)—But how shall I get out of here?

HOWARD—I have a long motor coat, goggles and a motor cap that will fit down over your head. It's just the thing. When the box starts, we'll telephone for an auto, and I'll drive you wherever you wish to go without fear of detection.

CLARA—Lovely! Please get the coat at once. I'm wild to be gone. (*To* PUTNAM)—Hurry! Hurry!

PUTNAM—Yes, m'am, I'se hurryin', m'am.

PROF. RICE—Now just be seated, young lady, and try to calm yourself while—er—ah—I order something for you to eat. Your food will do you no good while you are in such an excitable condition. Calm yourself. Think of the gentle—er—ah—ox—er—

CLARA—Mercy, don't tell me that! I'm scared to death of cows!

PROF. RICE—Well, well, just a moment. I will bring some food for you and the—er—ah—lambies.

PATSY (*sinking back in imitation of* CLARA)—Oi'm grad-u-lee famishin'. Oi would thot Oi had so much as a cracker to break.

PROF. RICE—There, there, just a moment.

CLARA (*to* HOWARD)—Please go. It would be just like those Juniors to climb up the fire-escape and find me here.

HOWARD—Going right now. Are you ready, Putnam?

PUTNAM (*throwing back his head and laughing loudly*)—Ho, ho, ho, ho! Yes, sah. Yes, sah. I'se ready, sah. (*They roll the box to the door.*)

CLARA (*looking rapturously at the box*)—I hope we shall meet again. (*Exeunt* HOWARD *and* PUTNAM.)

PROF. RICE—If the box could speak I am—er—ah—sure it would echo your wish.

CLARA—Oh, I wasn't referring to the box. I was referring to—

TOM—This ain't gittin' my top clothes.

PATSY—Oi wants de latch-pin fur me back hair.

PROF. RICE—Yes, lambie. Just a moment. If you will pardon me, I will—er—ah—get something which may appease your hunger. Just a minute, lambies. (*Exit.*)

TOM (*contemptuously surveying* CLARA)—Me sister could wear them thar shoes and stockings you got on.

GIOVANNI—I gotta sister, too.

PATSY—My sister could wear de dress youze got on.

CLARA—Mercy, children! I need a few clothes myself.

TOM—Ye needn't think we're took in by this con-game. We got ast over here to help ourselves to what we seen an' now we've seen it we're a goin' ter hev hit. Ain't we, kids?

HANS (*sniffling*)—Ach, ve ist pore leetle settlemint house kinder—pore and needy. Ve must have de clothes.

CLARA (*drawing back, almost frightened*)—But it's summer time. You don't need clothes to keep you warm in summer time.

TOM—I tell ye we needs 'em to keep de rain off, see!

CLARA—Really a little water would be good for you.

TOM—Don't you give me none o' your sass. (*Makes a rush at* CLARA.) Take off dem duds. (CLARA *screams and there is a knock at the door. The children survey exit expectantly.*)

CLARA—Oh, I mustn't be seen here. (*Looks about wildly.*) Surely the curtain is big enough to shield me. (*Dashes behind it.*) Thank fortune there is one. (*Knock repeated.*)

MRS. GRENVILLE (*pushing open door*)—George, dear. Where are you, my boy?

HANS (*complacently*)—We'se all here, m'am.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*in surprise*)—You're all here! Well, so it seems. And who may *you* be?

PATSY (*with sweet innocence*)—We're his lambies.

MRS. GRENVILLE—His lambies!

HANS—Und his flowers.

MRS. GRENVILLE—His flowers! Mercy, George's examinations must have told on his brain. He never liked children. Where is my son, children?

TOM—He went to git some salt fur his lambies!

MRS. GRENVILLE—Well, I never! I insist upon knowing where my son is, children.

TOM—He stole our top clothes and hiked.

PATSY—And our underclothes. Yes, he did.

GIOVANNI—And then he maka de supreme flight.

PATSY—He runned away.

MRS. GRENVILLE—George has gone away.

HANS—Ya, he ist joost gone.

HOWARD (*opening door with motoring things on his arm*)—The car's at the door. Everything's ready. Why—why—hello—Mrs. Grenville. (*Comes forward and shakes hands, looking nervously about the while.*) Where'd you come from?

MRS. GRENVILLE—I thought I'd come down and surprise dear George.

HOWARD—He'll be surprised all right. Very nice of you, I'm sure. George will be delighted.

MRS. GRENVILLE—But where *is* George?

TOM—He went off with my top clothes.

PATSY—And de latch-pin fur me back hair.

HOWARD—Why, George—why he's around somewhere. (*Calls*)—George—oh—George. Where are you?

PROF. RICE (*entering with a tea tray piled with cakes, etc.*)—Now lambies—I mean—er—ah—young lady—ah—er—(*Sees* MRS. GRENVILLE.) Er—ah—did you come to consult me about charity, madam?

MRS. GRENVILLE (*furiously*)—Do I look as if I were in need of charity? No, I came here to see my boy and I'm being insulted at every turn.

HOWARD (*hastily*)—Professor Rice is head of the town charity association. The ladies often come here to consult him about giving, Mrs. Grenville.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*rushing to shake hands with the* PROFESSOR, *who hopelessly holds tray*)—Oh, are you dear Professor Rice? I have heard so much about you and I'm so glad to meet you. So glad! Perhaps you will tell me what has become of my poor boy.

HOWARD (*anxiously*)—I've just told her George would be in at any moment.

PROF. RICE—Yes, yes, he's *in*—I mean, out—no, in. Yes, he was *in* when I saw him last. He's probably not out yet.

PATSY—Oi wants some cookies. (*Languidly*)—Oi famish fur 'raimint of de stummick.

MRS. GRENVILLE—George is out—in—fled? I don't understand at all.

PROF. RICE—Yes, lambie. I mean—er—ah—just a moment, madam. (*Sets tray on chair and there is a wild rush from the children to get to it.*)

MRS. GRENVILLE—You all act so strange. Tell me—where *is* my son?

TOM—Dey nailed him up in a box. Dey needn't let on dey don't know whar he's at.

HOWARD (*kicking at* TOM)—Shut up, you Mick.

MRS. GRENVILLE—Nailed him up in a box! You don't mean—oh, you don't mean—(*Makes elaborate preparations for fainting.*)

HOWARD (*hastily*)—Some girls penned him up in a box and took him over to the college. He's quite all right.

MRS. GRENVILLE—Penned him up in a box! Oh, my poor manly boy. They'll marry you—oh, they will—they will! George was always so popular with the girls.

HOWARD—He won't be popular this time.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*indignantly*)—All the boys are jealous of George. They strive to emulate his dignity, but can not acquire it. Poor George! Poor George! I must go protect him at once. Where is this—this so-called college? (*Turns toward door and curtain hiding* CLARA *falls.*) Mercy, now what?

HOWARD—Why—why, that's—the—the cook from the settlement house.

PATSY—We're her lambies.

HANS—Ya, ve're her lambies.

HOWARD—You see they—ah—all came to get some old clothes we had for them.

PATSY—An' dey got our tings.

TOM (*to* CLARA)—You give me dem duds.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*making for the door*)—Oh, my poor, manly boy! This must have driven you mad. Where are you? Oh, where *are* you? (*Exit.*)

PATSY (*flying after, followed by all the children but* TOM, *who tugs at* CLARA's *skirt*)—Hi, youse—youse got on me latch-pin fur me back hair. Give me my latch-pin!

(*Tableau and curtain.*)

ACT III.

SCENE—*Dimly lit South Corridor of Rutland College. It contains a settee down* R. *and another down* L., *statuary and palms as per diagrams. At rise* KATIE *and* MATTIE *are discovered on settee down* R. *They are attired in white skirts and light athletic sweaters bearing class numerals, from which they are picking burrs.*

KATIE—I never will be rid of these scratches on my hands and face. I was so anxious to grab Clara I never thought about brambles or anything else.

MATTIE—These awful burrs are what get me. They just won't come off! (*Laughs.*) But I don't mind burrs or going without my dinner or being half dead so long as we've got their old Senior president.

KATIE—Yes, that was a slick trick all right. I'm so glad we outwitted them. If that silly expressman hadn't gone off on a drunk we could have located the box right away this morning.

MATTIE—It was tough to put in three-quarters of the day running it down. The Seniors were as worried as we.

KATIE—Imagine! I heard one of the poor babies say they thought the box had gone to the Dean's.

MATTIE—How pleased and happy they looked at breakfast this morning! Their faces will show a fall in temperature tonight.

KATIE—A fall in temper all right. My, but I wish Cassie would hurry!

MATTIE—Wasn't it just our luck to have the old Dean ask her to dinner tonight? I believe she did it on purpose.

KATIE—Well, I told the girls to bring the box on up from the basement and we'll keep it till Cassie comes. Of course it wouldn't be fair to witness Clara's discomfiture without her.

MATTIE—No, of course not. Poor Clara! I feel a bit sorry for her—penned up in that box all this time.

KATIE—The girls have been feeding her through the cracks. I never saw such an appetite in my life. Here they come now. (*Enter* MINNIE, MARGARET *and* HAZEL L. *with box on truck.*)

HAZEL—Here we are for the grand unveiling ceremony.

MINNIE—Has Cassie come back yet?

KATIE—No! Isn't it punk?

MATTIE—Well, the later we wait the better the effect will be. Where are the rest of the class?

MINNIE (*leaving box on truck in front of settee* R.)—Most of the girls went down to McCabe's restaurant to see if they could get a bite to eat. A few are up in their rooms combing burrs out.

KATIE—Just as well. They know everything is safe now, Clara's caught. Wish I'd had something to eat. I feel as wobbly as an earthworm.

MINNIE—You can have the rest of this chocolate. (HAZEL *sticks crackers through cracks in box.*) Our prisoner is beginning to decline food.

MATTIE—Will she say anything yet?

HAZEL—No. We've tried to make her talk, but she won't. I thought she was dead till I saw her move.

CASSIE (*entering C. Back in evening gown and wrap*)—Oh, girls, wasn't it perfectly outrageous Mrs. Drake should ask me there tonight? Of course I couldn't refuse.

MINNIE—We have kept your captive in the refrigerator room. I assure you she's perfectly cool and ready to serve.

HAZEL—Yes, everything is ready for your august presence, Madam President.

CASSIE—Let us proceed with the opening of the box, then. (*Seats herself on the settee.*)

KATIE—Aren't you going to wait for the rest of the girls?

CASSIE—I'd like to, but I was ass enough to exploit our cleverness to the Dean and she made me promise to release Clara as soon as I got back.

MATTIE (*beginning to pry box-lid on one side as* MINNIE *works on the other*)—I suppose it would be more humane, but honest to goodness I hate to let her out.

CASSIE—We can keep her unboxed as well as boxed—especially if she's as well refrigerated as Minnie thinks. The rest of the class will be back in time to hear Clara read her acknowledgment of defeat and that's all that really matters.

KATIE—Oh, won't it be just lovely! I'm so glad I belong to the smartest class going!

MATTIE—Me too.

MINNIE—I bet you my new tango pumps Clara looks as cross as fighting pigs.

HAZEL—Nobody takes you. She'll wear a sad, resigned air of injured innocence. You see!

KATIE—She'll be an indignant queen.

MATTIE—Or frivolous. Pretend she let us catch her.

MINNIE—Madam President, I beg to announce that the covers are ready to come off. Is it your wish they be removed?

CASSIE—Proceed with the removal of the covers.

MATTIE (*throwing back covers*)—Arise, Clara Craddock.

(GEORGE GRENVILLE *shoots up like a jack-in-the-box. He wears* CLARA'S *kimono and boudoir cap to which he has affixed the false braid and puffs.*)

CASSIE—What have you to say for yourself?

GEORGE (*bowing profoundly*)—I am honored that you thought me worth so much trouble. (*Springs from box. Girls scream.*)

CASSIE—What were you doing in that box?

GEORGE (*innocently*)—I was dressing to come out.

CASSIE—Silly, I don't mean that. How came you there?

GEORGE—It's my home. (*Holds up empty milk can and cracker box.*) I've been sleeping, eating and cooking here. It's for rent now. Do you chance to want it?

CASSIE—Answer my questions, please. We have no time to frivol.

GEORGE (*ruefully*)—Well, I don't suppose this house would suit you. It does lack modern conveniences. There's electric lighting, but no gas stove. It really is pretty small. You have to step outside to change your mind—you can't do that inside.

CASSIE—I tell you I haven't time for trifling. Please explain your presence at once.

GEORGE (*dancing up and down with mincing steps and holding out his kimono while he improvises a tune for his words*)—There's nothing to explain—there's nothing to explain. There's nothing to explain—explain—there's nothing to explain.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*entering* C.)—Where is my poor, manly boy?

GEORGE (*turning in surprise*)—Why, hello, mater!

MRS. GRENVILLE (*rushing to him*)—Oh, my poor boy. I'm just in time—just in time. (*Turns to* CASSIE)—I should like an explanation of this brazen conduct. What do you mean by abducting a poor woman's only son? He shan't marry one of you, so there!

CASSIE—Madam, if this is your son, you do well to protect him. He has played a most scandalous trick upon us. A ducking would be too good for him.

MRS. GRENVILLE (*taking off* GEORGE'S *boudoir cap and rumpling his hair fondly*)—My poor, manly boy. How the women do impose on you. Come right home with mother, dear.

MINNIE (*aside*)—Mother has a peppermint drop for you, darling.

GEORGE (*trying to shake off his mother*)—Don't, mater. You make me a laughing stock.

KATIE (*springing up*)—We're the laughing stock. Girls, what shall we do?

CASSIE (*also rising in haste*)—I'm so dazed I don't know what to do.

KATIE—We've got to stop those Seniors, that's what we've got to do.

MINNIE—There may yet be time.

MATTIE—What idiots we've been.

MARGARET—Don't let's give up yet. Come! Hurry! (*They all start toward* C. *Back as doors* C. *are flung open. The Juniors back as if hypnotized and sink on the settees.* GEORGE *and* MRS. GRENVILLE *stand by the box staring at the spectacle. When the doors are flung wide, the Seniors wrapped in sheets and wearing tall conical caps of white paper, march slowly down, two by two, carrying lighted candles or torches and singing in a dirge-like manner. At the center of the stage they divide—one line going out archway* L., *the other out archway* R.—*aiming at two attractive curves rather than at right angles. They may repeat the stanzas given as much as necessary or invent new ones with local hits.*)

SENIORS (*singing to the tune of* "Where, O where are the Hebrew Children?")—

Where, O where are the Senior note-books,
Where, O where are the Senior note-books,
Where, O where are the Senior note-books?
Safe, safe, in the red, red flames.

They've gone out from the stuffy class-room,
They've gone out from the stuffy class-room,
They've gone out from the stuffy class-room,
Straight, straight to the red, red flames.
Where, O where are the war-like Juniors,
Where, O where are the war-like Juniors,
Where, O where are the war-like Juniors?
Deep, deep in black despair.
They stole our box and got a prize,
They stole our box and got a prize,
They stole our box and got a prize—
Quite a sur-prise for those wily thieves.
Where, O where is the Seniors' mascot,
Where, O where is the Seniors' mascot,
Where, O where is the Seniors' mascot?
Safe, safe in his mother's care.
She's come out to save him from us,
She's come out to save him from us,
She's come out to save him from us,
Poor, poor little mascot boy.

GEORGE (*excitedly to* CASSIE)—Who's that Senior president? She's a peacherino. I'll marry her or die!

CASSIE (*mockingly*)—That's Clara Craddock, son. You may marry her, but you'll have to catch her first.

KATIE (*ruefully*)—And CATCHING CLARA isn't so easy as it looks.

(*Curtain, as Seniors behind the scenes sing,* "She's come out to save him from us, she's come out to save him from us, she's come out to save him from us, poor, poor, little mother's joy.")

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